



HOLLAND IN THE 18TH CENTURY

Most art historians agree that the phenomenal development of artists in Holland during the 17th century was unique. In no other European country and at no other time were there so many artists working at the same time. It was indeed The Golden Age of Dutch art.

Changing political and economic conditions brought this great period of cultural vitality to an end during the close of the century. Even before the death of Rembrandt, Hals and Vermeer, interest in art from the classical world and from France began to change literature, art and fashion in Holland. By the turn of the century, some thirty years later, French style and language had captivated Dutch society. While some artists attempted to follow French trends, many others continued the subjects and styles of their illustrious predecessors. In spite of difficult economic conditions, the arts flourished.

A new generation of Dutch and American art

historians has begun to explore the art of 18th century Holland and to find that art of great beauty continued to be produced. Although the general level of quality among the numerous artists of the 18th century was not as consistently high as in the 17th century, there were nonetheless several significant masters whose work was internationally known during their own lifetimes. The museums of Minneapolis, Toledo and Philadelphia joined together in 1971 to present a significant and revealing exhibition of these highlights of 18th century Dutch art. Author of the catalogue of that exhibition was Roger Mandle, then at Minneapolis and now Associate Director of our Museum.

Articles by Roger Mandle and by Roger Berkowitz, recently appointed Assistant Curator of Decorative Arts, in this publication announce recent acquisitions by this Museum in 18th century Dutch art, and shed light on this delightful period.

Otto Wittmann, Director

Museum News

The Toledo Museum of Art
Toledo, Ohio

New Series: Volume 18, Number 1
1975

Cover: JACOB DE WIT, Dutch, 1595-1654
Zephyr and Flora, 1723, (detail)
Oil on canvas
Signed lower center: J. d. Wit inv. F.
19¾ x 24½ in. (50.2 x 62.2 cm.)
Gift of Edward Drummond Libbey
74.43

A CEILING SKETCH BY JACOB DE WIT

On Friday, May 1, 1722 at the Amsterdam City Hall, Jan Baptist de Surmont, Lord of Vlooswijk, married Margaretha Catharina Cromhout. The 34-year-old bride must have considered this marriage made in heaven; her titled husband was described by a neighbor even years later as a pre-eminently handsome man, who looked like a lion. She had been married before for only nine months to the wealthy Jacob Gilles who died in 1718 at the age of 50. Following his death, the now twice-wealthy widow decided to marry Surmont and purchased the grand house at 216 Binnen Amstel in Amsterdam (Fig. 1) on the 19th of December, 1720, no doubt in anticipation of her marriage. It is curious that the groom, who was living amply in his own house on the Singel nearby in Amsterdam, decided not to bring his wife to his own lodgings. We can only surmise what role Surmont played in the purchase of this house, which was in one of the most elegant and stylish sections of Amsterdam at the time. The house was next door to the wealthy Six family, descendants of Jan Six, of whom Rembrandt made the great portrait, which still hangs in the Six house, now a museum.

Although the owners of the Amstel house, the Huydecoper family, had set their price for the house at 65,000 guilders, the widow Cromhout and her intended husband may have already been planning to redecorate the large house in tune with contemporary taste, since 7085 guilders were subtracted from the asking price, reflecting the deletion of "furniture and certain appointments" from the deal. The house had a rather notorious history; built by Gysbert Dommer in 1668, it had been occupied intermittently by the Burgomaster Coenraed van Bueningen, a tragic, melancholic and finally deranged man who, rumor has it, painted inscriptions and names on the house walls in his own blood. The Huydecoper family seems

to have had primarily an investment interest in the Amstel house, and so when the widow Cromhout bought it in 1720 much may have needed updating.

Both the Cromhout and Surmont van Vlooswijk families were old and rich Catholic Amsterdam families, and their choice as decorator of their new home was Jacob de Wit, the most sought-after painter of ceiling and wall decorations in Amsterdam at the time. Only 27 years old in 1722, de Wit was even then well known to leading Catholic families in Amsterdam. De Wit had already painted some five decorations for the Cromhout family and so was well known to Margaretha Cromhout. Her cousin, who also became her brother-in-law in 1722, Jacob Cromhout, gave de Wit one of his first secular commissions, a ceiling decoration in 1717 for his country house in Beemster, and in 1719 a small ceiling painting for his house on the Keizersgracht in Amsterdam. Another relation, Godfried Cromhout, ordered a fireplace overmantel painting from de Wit in 1720.

De Wit was himself baptised a Roman Catholic in Amsterdam in December of 1695, the son of lower middle class parents. A precocious artist, he began his artistic training in the studio of Albert Spiers, a painter who had some local reputation for works in the "international style", which used elements borrowed from the Dutch neoclassical painter Gerard Lairesse, and from Spiers' trips to Rome. In 1708, Jacob's rich art-collecting uncle in Antwerp virtually adopted him (Jacob's mother died in 1702 and his father died in 1711), enrolling him in the studio of Jacob van Hall and introducing him to Antwerp artists and art collectors.

De Wit drew from the nude model at the Antwerp academy and copied the works of Rubens, van



Figure 1
Modern view of house at Amstel 216, Amsterdam
Built in 1668, the house was owned from 1720 by
Margaretha Catharina Surmont van Vlooswijk née Cromhout,
and her husband Jan Baptist de Surmont van Vlooswijk.

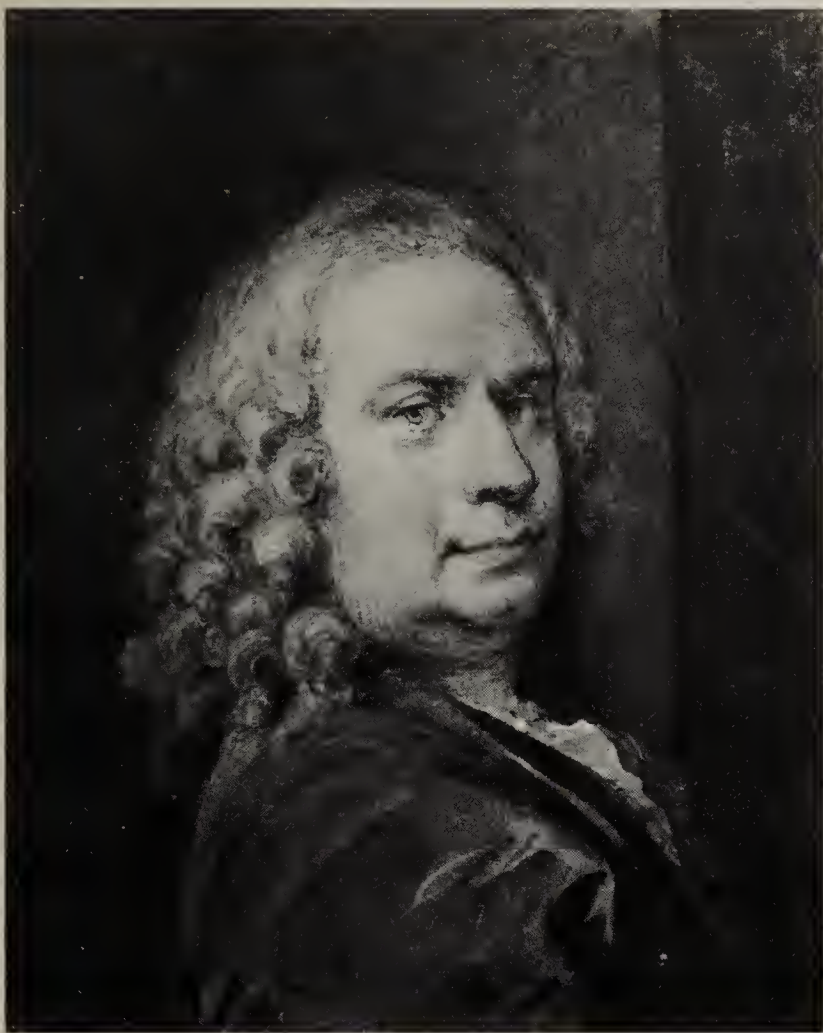


Figure 2
JACOB DE WIT (1695-1754)
Self Portrait
Black and red chalk, pen, black ink and wash with
watercolor, on paper
Signed upper right: J. d. Wit
5½ x 4⅞ in. (14.1 x 11.7 cm.)
Rijksprentenkabinet, Amsterdam

Dyck and other masters available to him through the churchly and other contacts of his uncle.

His knowledge of Rubens and van Dyck was important to the development of his style. In 1711-12, de Wit made accurate red chalk drawings of Rubens' 36 ceiling decorations for the Jesuit church in Antwerp; when the church was destroyed in 1718, de Wit's drawings and the prints made from them became the only complete documentation of the scheme.

De Wit (Fig. 2) returned to Amsterdam at about the age of 21, after having gained membership in the Antwerp St. Luke's Guild for Artists in 1713. He was immediately favored with commissions,



Figure 3
JACOB DE WIT (1695-1754)
Allegory of the Fall Season, 1752
Oil on canvas
Signed and dated on lower right: J. d. Wit, 1752
85½ x 57½ in. (217 x 146 cm.)
Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Kassel

being the first painter of purely Catholic subjects since the Reformation in Holland, and being preceded by a reputation for high quality decorative painting.

Although de Wit received several religious commissions, the major portion of his work was his delicate and lovely decorations for rich Dutch householders; on these works was based de Wit's international reputation even during his own lifetime. His commissions were typically for ceilings, for panels placed over doors and fireplaces, or for full-scale wall murals. These decorations most often illustrated classical mythology or allegorical subjects. He usually painted in soft pastel colors or in grey and white to imitate



Figure 4
 JACOB DE WIT (1695-1754)
 Study for Zephyr and Flora, 1723
 Black chalk, pen, brown ink and wash on toned paper
 Signed lower left: J. d. Wit invt. 1723
 10 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 9 $\frac{5}{8}$ in. (27.3 x 24.5 cm.)
 Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz
 Kupferstichkabinett, Berlin, KdZ 14577
 For ceiling decoration for Surmont van Vlooswijk
 house at Amstel 216, Amsterdam

carved plaster relief sculpture. These monochromatic paintings were called *witjes* (or little white paintings), as a pun on de Wit's name, and were sought after by patricians and rich merchants in Holland and abroad (Fig. 3).

De Wit's ceiling paintings and large wall decorations have graced elegant private houses in the environs of Amsterdam for hundreds of years, and as Dr. A. Staring pointed out in his monograph, *Jacob de Wit*, it is largely through his delightfully fresh drawings and oil sketches for these commissions that the world outside Holland has been able to enjoy de Wit's larger works. De Wit usually inscribed his preparatory drawings for ceiling decorations with the date and for



whom the decorations were made. Most of these he kept as a record in his studio.

From de Wit's inscription on the back of one of these drawings, now in the Kupferstichkabinett in Berlin, we learn that he painted a splendid ceiling decoration for Jan de Surmont in 1723. The Berlin drawing (Fig. 4), highly finished in pen and ink, shows Flora seated with attendants on a cloud being crowned with a garland of flowers, as Zephyr comes to join her from the upper right of the composition. Two attendant nymphs fly toward her from the right and left with garlands and baskets of flowers. Above Flora circle a group of cherubs. Clouds of the firmament billow about the figures, filling the composition with movement and atmosphere.

Figure 5

JACOB DE WIT (1695-1754)

Study for Zephyr and Flora

Oil on canvas

Signed lower center: J. d. Wit inv. if. 1723

19¾ x 24½ in. (50.2 x 62.2 cm.)

*Gift of Edward Drummond Libbey
74.43*

*For ceiling decoration for Surmont van Vlooswijk
house at Amstel 216, Amsterdam*



Figure 6
 JACOB DE WIT (1695-1754)
Study for The Crowning of Hercules
 Black chalk, pen, brown ink and wash, heightened
 with white on toned paper
 Signed lower center: J. d. Wit
 20 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 14 in. (51.1 x 35.5 cm.)
 Rijksprentenkabinet, Amsterdam
 For 1746 ceiling decoration for Barnaart family house
 in Haarlem

The drawing is enclosed in a drawn architectural frame, in which the four corners of a square are intersected by four near-half circles. As in many other de Wit sketches for ceiling designs, these architectural frames indicated the planned borders for the paintings on the ceilings. In some instances, the canvas would be cut to the shape and framed by a wood or plaster moulding. In other instances, the entire ceiling would be designed by de Wit and painted as one huge canvas, or painted in sections and mounted together. A drawing in the Rijksmuseum by de Wit for a ceiling decoration in the Barnaart family house in Haarlem (Fig. 6) shows a similar heavenly scene surrounded by a border depicting the labors of Hercules, here on a separate piece of paper superimposed over the drawing so he could perhaps show several different ideas for the borders to his patrons. De Wit's drawing shows plans for creating the charming double illusion of a room open to heavenly space bordered by architectural and sculptural elements.

After he worked up a drawn design that satisfied him, de Wit would probably make a color oil sketch for these large ceiling commissions, with drawings of alternatives, and present these to his patrons so that they could approve the scheme before he proceeded on the actual project. These oil sketches were valued for their own sake even in de Wit's day; no less than 44 oil sketches for ceiling paintings were sold from the contents of de Wit's studio after his death in 1755. De Wit's sketches generally represented his full intentions for these commissions. Although they are very similar to the finished ceiling paintings, nonetheless, they demonstrate a freshness and liquidity that compares favorably to the painting style of his French contemporary, Fragonard.

De Wit presented Jan de Surmont and his new wife one of these oil sketches for their own commission early in 1723; this sketch now provides the main clue to the appearance of the finished ceiling decoration in the Surmont household on the Amstel (Fig. 5 and Cover). Unknown to scholars until it appeared in a sale in London

at Sotheby's (July 25, 1973, lot 119), this sketch has now been acquired by The Toledo Museum of Art. The Surmont residence now houses a commercial bank and the de Wit ceiling painting has long since disappeared; the oil sketch, however, tells much about the probable appearance of the lost decoration. First, the oil sketch is virtually identical in composition to the de Wit drawing in Berlin described earlier, except for the addition of four spandrel designs, four cartouches, and more defined moulding rendering. It is probable that the four different cartouches at the center of each side, and the four different moulding patterns around the center and borders of the painting were intended by de Wit to give his patrons a choice, even in these small details. Each of the spandrels show two cherubs painted in rich terracotta color to appear as sculptural bas-relief. Two pair play with flowers and wheat, symbolic of Flora, and two pair play with an ear trumpet and twigs fallen from trees, attributes of the wind of Zephyr.

Whether de Wit suggested the subject of Zephyr and Flora, or whether it was chosen by the newlywed couple, one can imagine the flattered delight with which the Surmont van Vlooswijks must have received de Wit's sketch for their ceiling. Flora, goddess of flowers and gardens, crowned with garlands of flowers is shown gesturing to receive her husband Zephyr, one of the mythical winds, who gives her with marriage the privilege of enjoying everlasting youth. Zephyr was said to produce flowers and fruits just by the sweetness of his breath. He is shown as he was in early Greek depictions, as a man of handsomely delicate form with two wings on his shoulders and his head crowned with flowers.

An undated but early red chalk drawing by de Wit of *Zephyr and Flora*, in the collection of Mr. A. Staring, Vorden, Holland (Fig. 7), shows many of the compositional elements of the Toledo sketch rearranged. Zephyr is now shown appearing through a cloud; he is now linked more directly to his symbolic attributes, and is more clearly identifiable.



Figure 7
JACOB DE WIT (1695-1754)
Study for Zephyr and Flora
Red chalk on white paper
Signed lower left: J. d. Wit invt. & F.t.
10 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 11 in. (27 x 28 cm.)
Mr. A. Staring, Vorden, Holland



Figure 8
 JACOB DE WIT (1695-1754)
 Study for Zephyr and Flora
 Pen, brown ink and wash, red, grey, blue chalks on
 white paper
 Signed: J. d. Wit invt. & F.
 10½ x 7⅞ in. (26.1 x 20 cm.)
 Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, Rotterdam
 For 1725 ceiling decoration for Cornelis Wittert house
 between Delft and Rotterdam

Zephyr and Flora was a favorite subject of de Wit and his patrons. During his career he painted the subject as a ceiling decoration at least four other times; it is fascinating to study each reinterpretation of his first concept of the subject which he made for the Surmonts in 1723. In 1725, he painted a Zephyr and Flora ceiling decoration for Cornelis Wittert, Heere van Valkenburg, for his house between Delft and Rotterdam. A drawing for the painting, now in the Boymans Museum, Rotterdam (Fig. 8), depicts de Wit's plan for the ceiling. Like his painting for the Surmonts, this scheme has an elaborately shaped border, but now the large-scale figures swirl in a tight s-curve. The figures of Zephyr and Flora are now shown in the foreground, but are placed well back in



Figure 9
JACOB DE WIT (1695-1754)
Study for Zephyr and Flora
Pen, ink and wash on white paper
6 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 5 $\frac{5}{8}$ in. (15.5 x 14.3 cm.)
Staatlich Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz
Kupferstichkabinett, Berlin, KdZ 2250

space, the foreground occupied by a group of nymphs.

A drawing in Berlin (Fig. 9) may be an early sketch by de Wit for Wittert's ceiling decoration. While it is a loosely constructed sketch, it shows de Wit's intention to lead the viewer into the composition from the large nymph seated on the cloud at the right foreground. Although de Wit probably rejected using such small figures in the vastness of the space, he did incorporate figural elements on the right. Because de Wit used a "scissors-and-paste" approach to many of his ceiling compositions, it is extremely difficult to ascertain the chronology of these undated sketches. Fortunately, de Wit inscribed and dated



Figure 10
JACOB DE WIT (1695-1754)
Study for Zephyr and Flora
Oil on canvas
24 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 19 $\frac{5}{8}$ in. (63 x 49 cm.)
Sale, Paris (Galerie Fievez), 17/18 May, 1923, Lot 107



Figure 11
 JACOB DE WIT (1695-1754)
Study for Zephyr and Flora, 1725
 Oil on canvas
 Signed lower left: J. de Wit 1725
 Oval, 107½ x 248⅞ in. (373 x 632 cm.)
 Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, Rotterdam
 Ceiling decoration for house at Nieuwe Haven 37,
 Rotterdam

sketches for known ceiling commissions and these gave guideposts for relating the undated sketches.

An undated oil sketch by de Wit for a *Zephyr and Flora* ceiling, illustrated in a 1923 Brussels auction catalogue, possibly shows de Wit's return to the figural ideas of his painting for the Surmonts (Fig. 10). Using a more vast space, de Wit has drawn the nymph in the lower middle foreground in a variation of the pose of Flora in the Surmont ceiling, but has copied Zephyr's dramatic pose. A ceiling painting by de Wit for a house at Nieuwe Haven 37, Rotterdam, dated 1725 (Fig. 11), is related compositionally and stylistically, and suggests that the undated sketch was done at relatively the same time.

In 1744, for Mr. Gerrit Hooft's house in Amsterdam at Herengracht 609, de Wit again painted a *Zephyr and Flora* ceiling design. Although this painting was destroyed in World War II, an oil sketch by de Wit dated 1743 in the Metropolitan Museum, New York, shows the central painting with a shaped border (Fig. 12). In this sketch, the figures are rendered more softly, their flesh and fabrics appearing to be made of the same stuff as the clouds. The sky is more vast, and the figures of Zephyr and Flora, although the subject of the painting, are partially tucked behind clouds in glowing yellow light. They have become secondary to the overall extension of the light and space of the room below into the golden heavens, fully a rococo idea.



Figure 12
 JACOB DE WIT (1695-1754)
 Study for *Zephyr and Flora*, 1743
 Oil on canvas
 Signed lower left: J. deWit F. 1743
 20 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 24 $\frac{7}{8}$ in. (53 x 63.2 cm.)
 The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of J. Pierpont
 Morgan, 1906
 The Hoentschel Collection
 For 1744 ceiling decoration for Gerrit Hooft's house
 at Herengracht 609, Amsterdam

In 1746, as part of a very large commission from Cornelis Munter for overdoor, overmantel, grisaille roundels and ceiling decorations for his house at Herengracht 468 in Amsterdam, de Wit again painted a *Zephyr and Flora*. The paintings are still installed in the handsome house. A drawing, now in the Springell Collection, Portenscale-Cumb, England, shows de Wit's concept for the central panel of the ceiling involving even greater space, palpable atmosphere and light, and smaller scale figures. Figural groups now seem redundant from earlier commissions, and seem as decorative objects swirling in a simple curve in the air. Similarly vacuous but charming oil sketches of *Zephyr and Flora* were made by de Wit late in his career in 1753 (collection of Mr. A. Staring, Vorden) and

in 1754 (Fig. 13). A related drawing, in the Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin (Fig. 14), shows larger figures pressed more together, but in each case, the figure of Zephyr is partially hidden by the clouds, a pictorial concept designed more to play down the subject than to create a sense of drama.

The Surmonts' reception to de Wit's sketch for their ceiling must be put in the context of decorative taste and artistic trends during the first quarter of the 18th century in Amsterdam. Although French style in everything from clothes to architecture and literature had begun to affect Holland just as much as the rest of Northern Europe at the close of the 17th century, no polit-

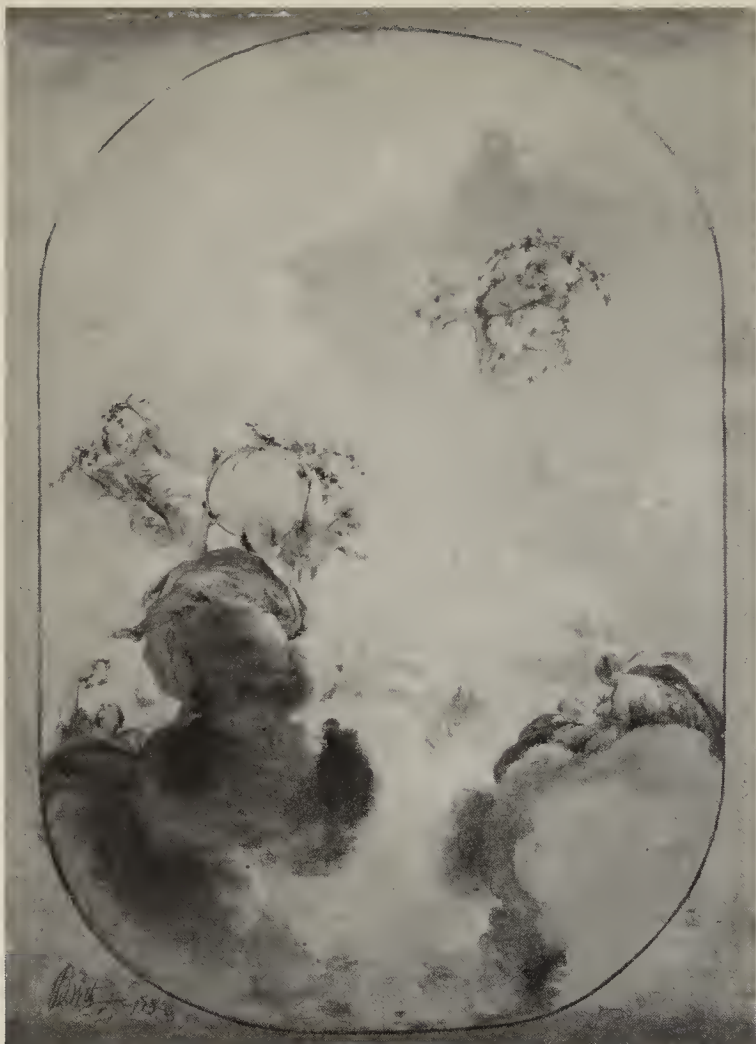


Figure 13
JACOB DE WIT (1695-1754)
Study for Zephyr and Flora, 1754
Oil on canvas
Signed: J d Wit F 1754
24¼ x 20¼ in. (61.5 x 51.5 cm.)
Sale, New York (Parke-Bernet), 18 June, 1974, Lot 88



Figure 14
JACOB DE WIT (1695-1754)
Study for Zephyr and Flora
Pen, brown ink and wash on white paper
Signed lower left: J. d Wit F + invt.
13⅜ x 11⅜ in. (34 x 29 cm.)
Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin College

ical event can have had such far reaching cultural influence as the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685. Thousands of Huguenots fled France, many coming to Holland, always known for its religious tolerance. Craftsmen, authors, architects, brought with them the style of Louis XIV. Daniel Marot, nephew of Pierre Goll, an important Dutch cabinet maker, fled France to Holland after apparently being well trained as a designer of furniture and decoration, and was soon in the service of the Stadhouder, William of Orange, as court exponent of an enlivened Versailles style of baroque decoration. Although his work was generally restricted to court commissions in the environs of The Hague, artists could know of his work through two volumes of engraved designs

for chairs, clocks, beds and all manner of decoration published in Amsterdam in 1702 and 1712. Marot's schemes were the answer to those rich Dutch families' desire for a new look of opulence that would reflect their wealth and position. This look was a radical departure from mid-17th century severity.

Along with the decorative flamboyance of Marot's decoration, painters were required who could create the illusion of extended space in Dutch city houses, which were more modest than French hôtels. These painters rejected the earthly poetic vision of Rembrandt, Vermeer and Hals in favor of a revived interest in Greek, Roman and Italian art. From the teachings of Gerard Lairesse



and Adrian van der Werff, the two greatest painters and academicians of the late 17th century, trips to Rome, Paris, or a good knowledge of art outside Holland through engravings, Dutch artists launched a new "international" style to suit the fashion of the times.

De Wit's painting style was undoubtedly seen by potential patrons and critics as a refreshing lift from the more ponderous forms of his artistic predecessors from the earlier generation. His paintings were infused with the warmth and grace of Rubens and van Dyck; so too was he interested in French art of this earlier period even more than that of his French contemporaries. The work of Simon Vouet, the great 17th century French

Figure 15
GIOVANNI ANTONIO PELLEGRINI (1675-1741)
Sophonisba Receiving the Cup of Poison
Oil on canvas
73 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 60 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. (185.7 x 154.3 cm.)
Gift of Edward Drummond Libbey
66.128



Figure 16
JACOB DE WIT (1695-1754)
Jupiter and Mnemosyne, 1727
Oil on canvas
Signed lower right: J d Wit 1727
88¼ x 85⅞ in. (225 x 217.5 cm.)
Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, 2694-A6
For the Surmont van Vlooswijk country house
in Loenen



Figure 17
JACOB DE WIT (1695-1754)
Jupiter, Diana and Callisto, 1727
Oil on canvas
Signed lower right: J. d Wit 1727
93½ x 79½ in. (238 x 202 cm.)
Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam
For the Surmont van Vlooswijk country house
in Loenen

decorator, must have particularly interested de Wit. Many of Vouet's most powerful paintings were engraved by Michel Dorigny, a contemporary of Vouet, and widely circulated to artists and collectors.

But if de Wit only knew of Vouet's paintings from engravings, he had another "foreign" influence in the person and work of Giovanni Antonio Pellegrini (1675-1741), an Italian artist who worked in Amsterdam between 1715-1720. It is Pellegrini's use of cool, airy colors, his application of paint, and his interpretation of light and atmosphere that probably influenced de Wit's style as much, if not more than the work of Rubens. A comparison of the Toledo *Zephyr and Flora* and Pellegrini's *Sophonisba* (Fig. 15), also in this Museum's collection, reveals de Wit's debt to Pellegrini's figural style and interpretation of dramatic gesture.

For patrons and collectors in Holland who generally preferred to sponsor artists of their own

country even more than foreign painters, de Wit was an artist of the younger generation who was able to create an effect in tune with the best elements of the developing rococo style. That the finished ceiling decoration pleased the Surmonts is certain, for in 1727 they commissioned de Wit to paint lavish wall murals to be incorporated in one of the rooms of their grand country house on the Vecht river in the town of Loenen, and in 1729 they asked him to paint a small overmantel painting for another room in their country house. Fortunately two large finished wall decorations have survived, being now in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam (Figs. 16 & 17). Whether there were others is not known. These two lyrical and romantic murals depict the story of Jupiter, Diana, Callisto and Mnemosyne. These wall decorations were extremely popular among wealthy Dutch householders, as they were in courtly homes across Europe; these elaborate paintings served to extend the space of the room.



Figure 18

JACOB DE WIT (1695-1754)

Study for Jupiter, Diana and Callisto, and Jupiter and Mnemosyne

Pen, grey ink and wash

Signed lower right: J d Wit

Inscribed on the reverse "voor de wel Edel Heer

Mijnheer Jan Baptist de Surmont Heere van

Vlooswijk op zijne Edel plaets tot Loenen 1727

Geschildert"

8 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 13 in. (22.4 x 33 cm.)

P. and D. Colnaghi and Co., London, May-June 1969

A finished drawing by de Wit showing the scheme for the two murals at Loenen came to light recently at an art dealer's in London; de Wit's inscriptions on the front and reverse of the drawing now help to secure the subject, intended placement, and that the Surmonts were the patron of these paintings (Fig. 18). The drawing shows the two large paintings flanking a door, or more likely, a fireplace. As in the oil sketch for the ceiling of their house on the Amstel, de Wit has shown his patrons, the Surmonts, two different mouldings and shapes of the canvas. It seems possible that the purely rectangular shape was chosen, since both the paintings in the Rijksmuseum are presently rectangular in format.

De Wit's overmantel painting for the Surmont country home is known through a drawing now preserved in the Städelschen Kunstinstitut, Frankfurt (Fig. 19). De Wit's inscription on the reverse side of the drawing identifies the Surmonts

as patrons, their country house as the location, and the date of the commission as 1729. The subject, in format, is of three cupids holding fish hooks, arrows and mirror, symbols of the lovers' chase, a sympathetic subject for the Surmonts' house.

Finally, it is possible that the Surmonts asked de Wit to paint some *witjes*, since there appears to have been at least a pair of these monochrome paintings in the Surmonts' house on the Amstel in Amsterdam as late as the 1950's. It is a pity that de Wit's decorations for this house did not remain intact. Had they survived, these paintings would have added to our knowledge of de Wit's stylistic development.

The Surmonts were one of de Wit's earliest and most important patrons. They and their relatives, the Cromhouts, were among de Wit's first patrons for secular decorations and helped establish his reputation in Amsterdam. De Wit's reputation continued its ascendancy even after his death. In 1785, Cornelis Ploos van Amstel, the most influential Dutch collector and art critic of the time, described de Wit as the contemporary model of the painter with "poetic vision".

Accounts by neighbors and others suggest a less glorious fate for the Surmonts, those earthly lovers who commissioned the *Zephyr and Flora* ceiling in 1723. Jacob Bikker Raije, in his now published diary, describes the tortured death of Jan de Surmont at the hands of a Doctor Tronchiijn, called to treat him for pleurisy, and the loud, drunken philandering of his notorious wife, Margaretha, that followed until her death a decade later in 1755. A marriage poem written in 1742 by the couple's son-in-law, Jan de Bas asks:

Can out of love, well through marriage one
to bind,

Two branches, so alike . . . ?

Those that allow no vile deceit their eyes to
blind . . .

Jacob de Wit's charming romantic paintings for the Surmonts still urge that ideal love, and please the viewer as examples of the finest art produced in their age.

Roger Mandle



Figure 19

JACOB DE WIT (1695-1754)

Study for Fireplace Overmantel Decoration
Pen, grey ink and wash

Signed lower left: J d Wit inv. & F.

Inscribed on the reverse "Schoorsteen Stuckie voor
de Wel Ed Heer Mijnheer de Surmont Heere van
Vlooswijk op syne Eds plaets tot Loenen 1729
Geschildert"

6 1/8 x 4 1/2 in. (15.6 x 11.4 cm.)

Städelschen Kunstinstitut, Frankfurt am Main

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A DUTCH MARRIAGE BEAKER

Around 1730, a silversmith was commissioned to make a beaker (Figs. 20, 21, 22) to commemorate the marriage of Klaas Pieterse Top to Marritje Hendricks. One may assume from the engraved scenes that one of those families was associated with the whaling industry which was dominated by the Dutch for well over a hundred years. Great wealth came to those involved in marketing whale products and Klaas Top or Marritje Hendricks was most likely a member of this merchant class enriched by the industry.

The beaker had been a popular shape for drinking vessels since the Renaissance and became a standard form in the Dutch silversmith's repertoire. By 1730, however, it was no longer an everyday object. Passing a beaker around the table had become unfashionable and the popularity of beer and wine, its usual contents, declined with the introduction in the latter half of the 17th century of tea, coffee and chocolate. Aesthetically, however, the simplicity of the cylindrical form with slightly everted lip maintained an appeal, continuing to be used for commemorative religious and secular vessels. It was for the latter purpose that the Toledo beaker was intended. It was made in honor of a marriage, as indicated by the typically 18th century inscription around the lip: "Klaas Pieterse Top/En Syn Hùysvrou [And His Wife] /Marritje Hendricks".

No official record of this marriage has been located. That the couple was married around 1730 was established by one of the series of marks found on the underside of the beaker (Fig. 23). Most Dutch silver has three or four marks, including a town mark, assay mark, date letter and maker's mark. These marks allow silver a more precise documentation than many other decorative arts.

The town mark was usually the civic coat-of-arms, in this case that of Amsterdam, indicating where the piece of metal was tested for purity. Once assayed, or tested (the grooves on the bottom show where a sample shaving was removed for testing), the piece was stamped with a lion rampant to indicate that the object was of the guaranteed standard of quality, 0.934 pure silver. This concern with purity emphasizes the precious nature of this metal. In addition to its aesthetic qualities, silver was also an easily converted source of money. Often chance alone saved much early silver from the melting pot, for what was not looted during war or used as a quick asset, was often melted down and refashioned in response to changing taste and fashion. It was items such as this beaker with its commemoration of a family event that were often spared solely because of their historical associations.

The date letter (a V in a circle) indicates the year the piece was made: 1730. It also establishes another assurance for the buyer of the quality of the metal. The date letter was not intended to aid later silver scholars; rather, it was stamped so that if the purity of a piece was questioned, one could determine who was in charge of the guild at the date of assay. (The 1627 officers of the Amsterdam Goldsmiths' Guild are portrayed in a painting by Thomas de Keyser (1596-1667) in Toledo's collection.) These letters have been used in Amsterdam since 1502, annually changed in alphabetical order.

The maker's mark is a head in left profile. While during the 18th century, the silversmith's initials were increasingly used, there were still many instances where a symbol, such as a head, tree, or star was employed. Many of these maker's symbols have been identified with the name of



Figure 20
Beaker
Dutch (Amsterdam), 1730
Silver
Ht. $7\frac{3}{4}$ in. (19.9 cm.)
Gift of Edward Drummond Libbey
74.51



Figure 21
Another view of figure 20



Figure 22
Another view of figure 20

the individual who used it; the silversmith who used the profile head stamped on this beaker, however, remains anonymous.

It is not necessary to know the maker's name in order to consider his approach to his craft, as this can be gleaned from the beaker itself, the work of his hand. The form of the beaker was effected by beating a sheet or block of silver with a hammer. The silver was beaten into a hollow bowl and then hammered from the outer edge in, compacting the silver while heightening it. A beaker, therefore, is an object which is thickest at its base and thinnest at its lip. While some beakers are made of several sections pieced together, the body of this beaker is formed from one piece of silver, with applied foot mouldings. The blows of the hammer on the inside surface of the beaker are further reminders of the craftsmanship involved.

As the form of the object is one more commonly encountered in preceding centuries, so too the decoration of the beaker is more closely associated with the 17th rather than the 18th century. The reasons for such conservatism could rest both with the silversmith and his patron. While Dutch silversmiths were generally more restrained than their contemporaries in England or especially France in their use of fashionable forms and decorative motifs, it is likely that the maker of this beaker may have geared his work to a more middle class clientele. It would be understandable for this patron to prefer a style and decoration for his beaker that were more popular during the 17th century ascendancy of Dutch whaling. It was also a period of relatively plentiful sources of whaling scenes in prints and paintings with which to inspire patron and silversmith. It may thus have well been a combination of circumstances that contributed to the tradi-

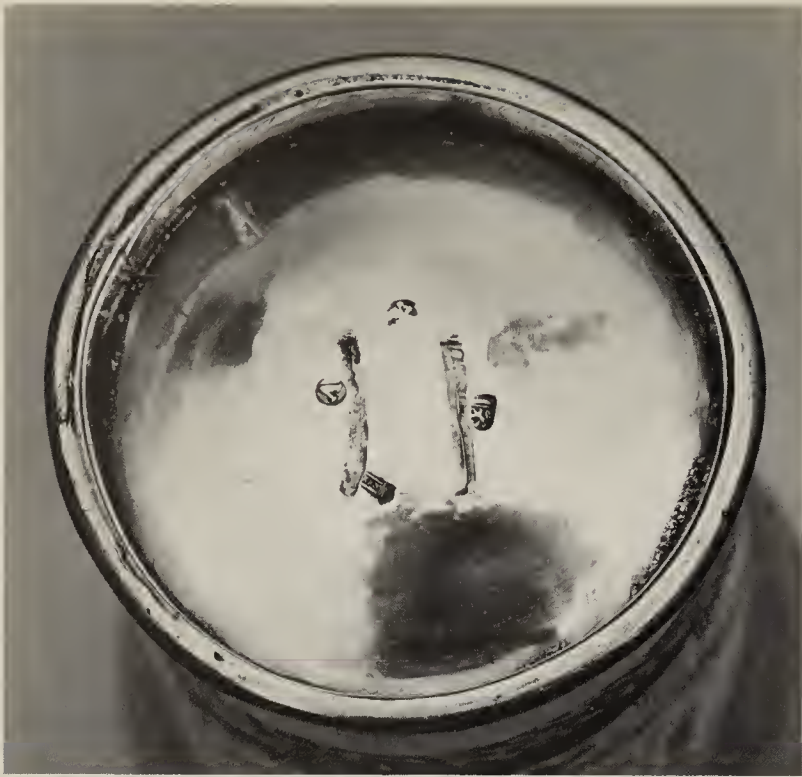


Figure 23
Underside of figure 20

tional form and decoration chosen for the object to commemorate this marriage and to suggest the level of affluence to which the couple was heir.

Engraving is the sole means of decoration. This technique involves removing metal by cutting a design into the surface with a sharp tool. By adjusting the pressure applied on the tool, the engraver can achieve varied, albeit limited, effects of light and shade. Engraving takes good advantage of silver, playing upon its qualities of depth of brilliance and reflection, without imposing upon or detracting from the simplicity of the object itself.

The lip of the beaker is engraved with a band of flowering foliage, interrupted with three winged cherub heads at equal intervals. These heads have not been standardized by the engraver, for each possesses its own expression. Interspersed among the foliage are a variety of flowers, including the cornflower and rose, which may have been employed for their symbolic associations with the themes of love and marriage. The inscription with the names of the couple are engraved within simplified strapwork, a popular framing device of Renaissance origin, from which hang bunches of fruit.

The majority of the engraved decoration is concerned with the exciting and dangerous episodes of a whale hunt. The unbroken, curved form of the beaker provides an ideal vehicle for these ambitious scenes. The nonsequential vignettes are linked by a variety of iceberg shapes, suggestive of the frigid waters of Spitzbergen in

the Arctic Ocean, an area first discovered and explored by the Dutch in the late 16th century.

Dutch whalers left their home ports in ships such as those on the beaker. These ships weighed about 350 tons, with an average length of 112 feet and beam of 28 feet. The crew of about 50 underwent many hardships during these long, cold voyages. When a whale was sighted, men would be dispatched in small open boats from which they would try to harpoon the whale with barbed spears. (Fig. 21) Once the harpoon had caught hold, a line was let out from the boat to the harpoon. The whale hunted in this area was known as the right whale, a species that moved slowly and could be impeded by the line from the harpoon as it tried to escape. Eventually the whale became sufficiently tired to allow the whalers to surround it and attack it with long, sharp lances. (Fig. 22)

Once killed, the whale was towed back to the ship where two boats moved outside the whale to hold it in order that other members of the crew could cut out the blubber by sections, which were then hoisted onto the ship. (Fig. 20) This was the first of many steps to convert the blubber into oil for lighting and fuel. The whalebone and sinews were utilized as well in this profitable industry.

The maker of this graceful beaker has thus created an object which records not only an early 18th century Dutch marriage, but also an important chapter in Holland's commercial history, the time of its whaling supremacy.

Roger M. Berkowitz

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